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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Kankakee ECDA is Selected for the AmeriCorps VISTA Program through the Housing Action Illinois**

**Kankakee, Ill. (November 2, 2021)** - The City of Kankakee's Economic and Community Development Agency (ECDA) was selected by Housing Action Illinois to participate in a new initiative with AmeriCorps VISTA to build the agency's capacity for housing counseling programs. Kankakee is one of only five cities selected through a region-wide application process, and will host two AmeriCorps members for the full 2022 calendar year.

Frequently described as "the domestic peace corps," AmeriCorps members serve as full-time volunteers for summer or full-year terms in many of America's leading nonprofits, faith-based, and community organizations to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement. Participants have opportunities to develop leadership skills, gain professional experience, and access a vast alumni network of public servants. Members will receive a living allowance, housing stipend, and transportation assistance, and will be eligible for forbearance from most federally-guaranteed student loans during their service. After their service year, members are eligible for the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award that can repay qualified student loans or current educational expenses.

"ECDA is looking to expand our offerings and provide a broader variety of housing counseling services to the community", says ECDA Executive Director Barbi Brewer-Watson. "This opportunity will help us across the finish line with our strategic goal of becoming a HUD Certified Housing Counseling Agency."

ECDA has successfully provided housing counseling and homebuyer education classes for the past four years to city residents as part of its Kankakee Homebuyers Incentive Program (KHIP). The two AmeriCorps members chosen for service with the city will help ECDA grow through program design and implementation, curriculum development, and organizing a volunteer housing counseling program. "Our AmeriCorps members will enable us to start providing rental

counseling and foreclosure counseling, both critical services for our community now that the state's eviction moratorium has ended," said ECDA Compliance Officer Jonathan Shinabarger. "We're thrilled about the opportunity to work with service-minded people to kick-start this work."

"Participation in this program will assist us in becoming one of a few certified municipalities in housing counseling services and ultimately opens the door to be able to apply for additional funding from HUD.", says Mayor Curtis. "Ultimately this will provide more housing opportunities and growth and will enhance our public safety through the stabilization of our neighborhoods."

Applications are currently being accepted for the two service members. The ideal Housing Counseling Development AmeriCorps member would be a self-starter who is familiar with further developing a start-up program. They would be enthusiastic about helping others and would have experience working and collaborating with diverse populations. If an individual is interested in applying to this program, please visit the [ECDA website](#) or the [AmeriCorps website](#). The deadline for applications is December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Please feel free to contact ECDA at [yourvoice@citykankakee-il.gov](mailto:yourvoice@citykankakee-il.gov) with any questions.

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#### **About AmeriCorps:**

AmeriCorps, a federal agency, brings people together to tackle the country's most pressing challenges, through national service and volunteering. AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serve with organizations dedicated to the improvement of communities. AmeriCorps helps make service to others a cornerstone of our national culture. Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](https://www.americorps.gov).

#### **About Housing Action Illinois:**

Housing Action Illinois has led the movement for affordable housing in Illinois for more than 30 years. We unite a statewide coalition of more than 150+ organizations dedicated to protecting and expanding the availability of quality affordable housing throughout Illinois. We believe that housing is a human right and envision an Illinois in which everyone has a good, stable home. We work toward this by advocating for laws and policies that help renters and homeowners, building the capacity of our member organizations through training and resource development, and educating and organizing the public and agencies throughout Illinois.

#### **About the Economic and Community Development Agency (ECDA):**

The Kankakee Economic and Community Development (ECDA) is a local government agency whose mission is to improve the lives of Kankakee residents and enhance the economic vitality of communities through housing, economic development and community development. The ECDA administers programs that serve the neighborhoods and residents of the City of Kankakee provided by federal, state and local funding. For more information, contact ECDA at 815-933-0506, Monday – Friday between 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit our website at <https://ecda.citykankakee-il.gov/>.

**About the City of Kankakee, Illinois:**

The City of Kankakee is dedicated to protecting, building and nurturing the community while enhancing lives. We are a historic, vibrant and active riverfront community. We continue to transform into an extraordinary place to dream, grow and thrive. Embracing our diversity, we strive to be progressive, inclusive and innovative. For more information on the City of Kankakee, please visit the website at [www.citykankakee-il.gov](http://www.citykankakee-il.gov).